Idea Notes from Class 02, Sep 9, 2013

Note #01.

I was struck by David's observation and Liyan's concluding points about the diversity at the state/province level in both China and the US (in level of urbanization and GDP). Since China is so similar to the regression line formed by all other countries on the economic/demographic scatter plots Liyan showed, it really does seem that scale and political process are the two most important attributes in China's transition and tis implications for global resource demands. In the very top-down structure of the central government, it seems like there is potential to address the resource challenges they will continue to face, but at the same time, we have seen mixed results in the implementation of central mandates. Can these mandates overcome culture? Can they overcome chicken/egg problems? For example, the huge investment in building a brand new city of Ordos failed to resettle people into their new center. I hope the government can figure out how to urbanize in a response way and take local prefers into account, but the odds seem long, at least in the near term...

Note #02.

This has been an interesting class which kind of proved in a lot of ways that China is not an outlier. However, there are various other dimensions other than the economic and urbanization trends that make me think that China is an outlier, is unique like the Hukou system/control of the central state. What kind of lessons can we draw from this class which could be useful for my country? Is this course going to give me away insight on the issues of rural-urban migration and the governance of the cities? However, this class makes me think differently.

Note #03.

The question of what is "urban" and what is "outlier" still struck me as problematic terms. Cities (defined administrative ???) is one small part of what urban is. Urbanization to me is the transformation of materials/land through the agency of capital. It is about the distribution of the capital (how) and the agents that transform (who and the intervention). In the case of China or other developing countries like India or Indonesia, the urbanization may not occur in

cities. Land transformation embedded with "urban" logics/morphology and aspirations are happening across urban-rural transect. This means also that we need now definitions, or new ways of defining these terms for an increasingly nuanced and variegated settlements under the theme or rapid urbanization of developing countries.

This relates to the term "outlier". The term principly assumes a model, an ideal form/condition and a single vector for trajectories. It may be relevant for comparisons but extremely, I will argue, irrelevant in understanding the dynamics in the process of urbanization process of urbanization in China. What is needed is not an alibi that vindicates China from rapidly urbanizing landscape but a new operative lens that will help elucidate how this quantum leap in the scale of land transformation.

Note #04.

The presentation today inspired me to think about quality versus quantity. When we talk about urbanization, and whether China is an outlier, we look at quantitative data. It is easier to miss out a lot of information. I think that an average point made for two different countries might be the same, but dispersion of scores or a range of scores differ signify. The presenters point on differences of urbanization compares states of the US and provinces of China is interesting to look at. This might be qualitative part of the research.

Note #05.

I am curious about the assumption that a country can be over- or under-urbanized. For a given GDP level, what is wrong with having a highly concentrated population with urban services and infrastructure? Are there examples of countries that more urbanized than their GDP would suggest, but without slums, and what is wrong with their model? Is there a way to quantify the causal relationship between urbanization and GDP?

I would also want to look at internal variability (e.g. the GINI coefficient, or perhaps the urban-to-rural income ratio) as an important metric in understanding China's urbanization and whether it is an outlier or not.

By the way, we should say urbanization ratio, not rate, as a rate refers to the

derivative of a quantity with respect to time (as in "growth rate").

Finally, I'm curious whether we could model economic growth as a physical diffusion problem, with wealth sources (cities) which radiate their wealth outwards to the rest of the country, and simultaneously attract population to themselves. One could then quantify whether China's "wealth diffusion constant" is comparable to other countries.

Note #06.

I really liked the comparison of China with cities like Dubai and Lowell, and the pollution comparison with London. But I agree with the other classmates that the time period is important and how we were less aware of our facts then and now we have more knowledge to deal with the issues.

The discussion of if there really is one China is also interesting. In India we have a very similar situation as China, where each city has its own complexity and conditions. Some cities in India are rapidly urbanized not because there is a need, but more because politicians can bring in their black money into construction projects. This leads to almost 80% of the houses being empty.

The lecture was a little fast, but interesting none the less.

Note #07.

The class discussion on whether China is an outlier largely would up on what it consider the most promising fact: for the claim the role of the government. I know very little about Soviet urbanization – it was shocked to see how fast the USSR had urbanized. What were the roles of the government, land ownership polities, and peasants in their process? Does China best compare to the USSR, Japan, Korea, or some other country (or not) in terms of the government role in urbanization? … the government-market co-leadership of urbanization what makes China there unique? How about the ??? land use rights policy? Or high levels of foreign investment and cultural mimickry? Provision of public goods (housing, transporting, etc.)?

On a separate note, is the high level of return migration to rural areas (and the tendency to leave young children there with grandparents) that the Hukou system ??? by other historical examples? How about education-induced

migration on the huge scale, the recent push for college graduates has engendered?

Note #08.

I really like the concluding remark on the idea of " Internal Complexity", which points to the very reason why we are studying Chinese urbanization as a unique topic. It is really interesting (and ironic) to see that under a centralized government, the life quality in different proving or different cities in China vary a lot, whereas the life quality in different states in the US is rather very close together under individual state governments.

Another supporting point on why China is unique, I think the time frame also matters. We are now at a time of globalization when knowledge and technology are transmitted rather quickly if not instantly. This needs to be considered in projecting Chinese economic growth.

Note #09.

①Statistics makes "what is outlier" question easily to answer.
I was thinking the process of urbanization was the standard to consider whether China is an outlier. Just like the process of growing make maple and Dine tree all belong to plant. According to the charts we can find, the processes are similar. During the different time and periods, everything are different, so we can't compare all of the aspects together, just like we said in class.

②It's interesting to see that China is kind of following the steps of the USA urbanization process. This gives us a sight about the future development of China. Whether the government will try to copy the way that USA dealing with problems caused by the urbanization? It's interesting to see.

Note #10.

I'd rather say, China is special on the way of urbanization to compare with other countries.
Its communist, one party regiment.
Its large land and diverse nations.

Its low per capita resources according to the word's largest population.

Its controlled and isolated media communication, for almost 50 years before internet boomed.

I believe these, but not limit to these elements. Put China in a very unique situation in urbanization.

I told people who agree with me about Chinese political stand points, that the current circumstances is the only way to have a steady growth and stable society. However I am not involved in joining to speak out, not only because I'm powerless, but also, nobody would listen or care.

Note #11.

By contrast with other developing countries, I don't think China is an outlier. And also, China is going to follow the way that US and European went.

However, there is no doubt that China meet lots of special issues currently. After this class, O learnt that economic development might be the most important and fundamental point to improve the life quality of Chinese. In addition, life quality could be regarded as the direct connection between people and urbanization.

I also learn a lot from the Liyan's data statistic. Thank you.

Note #12.

Today, Liyan's presentation showed how similar China and US are in the track of development, especially in the area of energy consumptions.

However, I feel that the statistics and dimension chosen are somewhat partial (of course due to time limits). There are other aspects that are not mentioned, and may be hard to present in numbers. For example, the differences in 'noosphere' between contemporary Chinese and Americans then.

Note #13.

Is China really an outlier?

In my point of view, the urbanization and development in developed countries were driven by economic development. In general, whenever the economy the society/nation grows, creates a lot of job (demand) opportunities, and of course the supply will definitely go to cover that. This is a balance of supply/demand equilibrium in healthy economy. From this point of view, China is not an

exception either.

But, when things go to politics, governance, legislations, constitution, the power that make decisions, I would say China is an outlier for sure.

Note #14.

Good presentation of Liyan to show how China sits in the normal curve of urbanization in terms of speed, Economic, Outcomes and environmental costs.

But we cannot only use the above three aspects to say China is not "special" at the process of urbanization. The people's anticipation and concept of living in an urban area is unique. Before 1949, China is under a different political system, which is different from most of the developed or developing countries. And even after 1949, the political system is still quite special. Therefore, I think even though China is not an "outlier", it is still a very special case of urbanization.

Note #15.

To the point of whether China is an outlier, I would probably argue that in which dimension or grope is China an outlier?

Even in the analysis of those charts provided by Liyan, he also clustered several different groups for comparison, such as developed countries or developing countries. If we put China roughly in the whole world we could easily find another similar case maybe in Dubai which has also witnessed a super fast urbanization process, but are China and AEU comparable in the same group? They have different background in almost every aspect! Therefore I think the problem is in which group are we putting China into when we talk about the question of "outlier".

Note #16.

Social institutions are unique in China, where remains an institutionalized rural-urban divided society.

There are 690 million urban dwellers account for 51.3% of China's total population of 1.35 billion, of which there are 260 million migrant workers (19.3%). They are allowed to go and work in the city but at the same time are not

permitted to acquire an urban registration. (public education, public housing, and social security programs)

So, it may be a "semi-urbanization" in China, which is different from other countries.

Note #17.

While I really liked the data visualization presented by Liyan that shows the extent to which China has conformed to the world's past urbanization trends, I still ponder if the GDP/econ relationship (or any similar pairings) could be so dominantly used to judge whether China is an outlier. When I think about "urbanization", it is not just a snapshot of the statuses of X vs. Y vs. Z across time, but rather an intricate system of dynamic components – changes in lifestyles, social relations, thoughts, cultures, in addition to the provisions of urban infrastructures and services. Urbanization is something larger than the sum of its parts, and, when analyzing and comparing urbanization, how these parts sum up together seems to be more important than the snapshot of components. I still think there is something tremendously special about China's urbanization -- I just can't pinpoint what exactly it is yet.

Note #18.

The contrast between the per-country urbanization curves and China's per-city urbanization rates was the most telling for me, and was the piece of evidence that started to describe the quality of urbanization. My impression of the per-city growth chart is concerned more with the growth of small cities than David's emphasis on the uniqueness of mega-city growth. According to that chart's picture of an emerging landscape of similarly-sized cities (that may or may not be 'urban'), the settlement network is not converging towards the mega-city (despite their growth) or concentrated growth scenarios offered by MGI (2009) as the target urbanization patterns that might form the scaffold for both future economic growth and quality-of-life improvements. If China isn't an outlier in its capacity to shape such large-scale urbanization, we are making excuses for its current challenges in this historical moment--and, as Sterman argues, we are all doomed if China does not actively engage in managing the negative byproducts of urbanization. In other words, I agree with those in the class who cited qualitative conditions in China that make it an outlier.

Like Liyan's emphasis (due to time constraints) on the urbanization rates vs. PPP in his presentation, the Chen/Liu/Tao article was also more of a litmus test of how one values urbanization than evidence of the meaning of urbanization rates. The article only begins to mention the essential mechanisms of urban development, and then it concludes by apparently dismissing its own analysis of the value of assessing under- vs. over-urbanization. How can we combine these quantitative and finer-grained qualitative assessments?

Note #19.

While I tend to believe in that China is not an outlier, in this case I would like to offer some different evidence to support the counter-argument

Basically the policies have constrained the urbanization, which makes it different from other countries, possibly an outlier

•	Because of the household registration measures, coupled with more stringent ones in large cities, mostly people who believe they could find jobs come to urban areas and the large ones. As a result, the level of population concentration in large cities is still low as compared to the rest of the world, benchmarked with its current income levels. According to OECD (2013), the share of the population living in cities of over 8 million inhabitants in China has almost tripled but, reflecting constraints on the growth of very large cities, still remains well below the proportion of the population living is such large cities in the rest of the world.
•	Also, as migrants are able to endure low life quality, the level of space per capita is low (22 m2) as compared with the rest countries with similar income levels. The graph Liyan showed is wrong given the data has not taken into account the migrant population.
•	In addition, land constrain policies have made Chinese cities less sprawl, but yielding higher property prices (as benchmarked with its income level and rent level), but also at the macro level it turns to lead into bubbles.
•	Finally, regarding the by city population growth rate, smaller cities are high due to starting low, but not the scale increase in population. In fact, 50 large cities account for almost 80% urban population increase during 2000-2010 (OECD, 2013).

Note #20.

I would like to think about how and what we measure when we compare across countries and even regions within countries. Today's lecture made me especially aware of this because there were many interesting graphs showing China's urbanization and economic development within the context of the rest of the world.

Liyan's graph that showed the (rough) relationship between economic development and urbanization showed that it makes sense not only to look at urbanization as an indicator of economic development, but it also shows that this pattern applies globally. However, the number of 'exceptions' or 'unhappy families' that Liyan showed far outweighed the 'normal' results from that graph. This drove home the idea that was in the back of mind the entire class: To me it doesn't make sense to talk about global trends since different regions or countries have their own unique paths of development, and it's a matter of find those groups. This also leads to the point made in class today that, even within China, there may be two or more different 'China's since the rural and urban parts of China behave very differently.

Note #21.

Talking about China, I can't say that it is an unusual case.

Urbanizing China seems to be a great example of a "low base effect". The urbanization process was not in active stage during a long period of time (for example two centuries as in US), when the most current developed countries were urbanized step by step. In 1970-s China found itself as a large power underurbanised and underdeveloped but with huge resources.. And it was logical to stimulate the urbanization process.

The means, of this urbanization are even not unique. Moving people from their villages to the cities was usual in USSR and equally effective (during 8 years from 1929 till 1937 in USSR level of urban population doubled – from 17% to 34%). But I see one serious problem with the Chinese urbanization in comparison to the Soviet one. In USSR urbanization was the necessary condition of industrialization. Huge factories and plants were built and people were taken from the villages to become a new workers. There was another target except just quantitive urbanization of 250 mln during the next ten years (as it is claimed in China). And the workers got their social and housing infrastructure, may be not

at once but complete and without exclusions.

In China it seems to be just a target to move the people, but their providing with work and financing is not solved and won't be solved under the market conditions to my opinion.

And also I wonder, if there is a general developing plan in China? In USSR it was and on its base it was decided which areas of the country have to be urbanized and when, which cities will accumulate new citizens and on which speed. According to this plan all the regions created their own planes etc. Plan was a great mean of controlling the urbanization process. But the economic and administrative systems were different. It had its own cons, as the main part of all decisions didn't take into account any market strategies and plants, factories were places into the new locations without any comparative analysis. And this is a possibility for China, on my mind. To plan but to count before.

And also one thought about the USSR urbanization results. Without waiting for "gestation" of villages into the cities Soviet government tried to speed up this process. In the end, 20 years after the crashing of USSR we have a lot of "sets of settlemets" not the cities as they should be. Yes, these settlements have sewage system, multy-storied houses, but thy are not livable. As the main purpose of their creation – some plant or factory just was closed during 1990-s. And that is why it is a crucial question about the development plan for every new organized city in China.

Another problem of urbanization which will face China (as it was with USSR) is a problem of marginalization of city population. All these people, who were yesterday villagers and didn't have enough education and culture won't altogether become urban citisens at once. Moreover not all of them even have this possibility (if I understood properly the huhou system). What USSR got as a result of the same process? Administrative staff of all the levels of government (local and regional especially) will be composed from the ex-villagers with their specific way of thinking. According to one Russian research in 1930-1989 years there were only 7% in the highest levels of Soviet administration who were born in Moscow or Saint-Petersburg and another 18% were born in large cities. All other were from small province towns or village.

I have one note about the comparison which was made by Liyan between Vermont and the least developed region in China. I don't think that such comparison is correct.. On my opinion the province as it is in US and in China are very different things not only by the current level of development, but also according to the way of formation.

The territory of US was mastered step by step by the people who came here to live here and to create here the "new world". They didn't think that they are

coming from the center to the province or even to the periphery (unfortunately, I don't know if the urbanists in US of in China make any difference between these two concepts, but we do). No, they just came from the old "mastered" territory to the new and they wanted to get it. And this way of meaning and doing (to my opinion) is in the basement of such deep level of mastering the territory. And that is why the New americans didn't leave any free space for the local Indians – that was their new native land and they wanted to get it completely.

Another story is about the large countries, especially centralized (as China or Russia were). In our countries province – is not the center, it is the "last" land. I'm now reading the book you recommended in syllabus (China's urban transition – by Friedman). And it is written there that city was counted as a city only if it was obeyed to the Empire forces. When there is a very strong center and power vertical – province is always sick.

And that is why I think that it could be more correct to compare that undeveloped part of China with France province (for example), with Spanish province or att least with Russian province. I'm sure that the pictures will be just the same.
In any case the question of province and its quality and its role (as a resource of people and free space, as a place to run from the central power, as a space for placing state secrets – politics of «in mountains, in dispersion, and in caves") is very interesting. Of course it is a little bit apart from the main theme of "Urbanizing China"

Note #22.

Some believed that though going through very similar pollution problems as London did 50 years ago, China still is an outlier, since we have advanced technology and ideas today. A "normal" urbanization should put environment into consideration. However, I have different opinions. No matter how advanced the world has developed, people always need to consider bread before long-term benefits such as protecting the environment. It's human nature, according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs. I'm not trying to defend polluting. It's just that what is the right thing to do and what is the common urbanization trajectory are two different questions. The urbanization of China being accompanied by some sustainable issues seems most "normal" to me, which should be evidence that China is actually not an outlier.

Note #23.

My main reflection on this class is that Chinese development might be happening among similar paths as that already developed countries took but that due to its great population its influence in the rest of the world will probably be much stronger. This will reflect itself no doubt in food and commodity prices and in environmental conditions.

The other point that seems important to me is that while urbanization does not seem to be enough to increase a country's income, it does seem to be a prerequisite for increased income in the long term. No high income country seems to have low urbanization rates.

Note #24.

I'm extremely interested in the institutions that have influenced China's urbanization, and I'm not quite convinced that China isn't an outlier because of the role these institutions, market conditions, and globalization play in shaping it's urban development. Furthermore, I don't quite fully believe that technology or in any case capital T Technology is the answer to some of China's issues, or even what makes China's urbanization and growth unique to begin with. In fact, perhaps the limiting of technology (and free speech) in China had played a bigger role than we think.